

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

April 2009

CUTS DO HAVE A COST

Fire losses hit record levels
as deaths rise **See page 10**

New Dimension

Confusion, fraud and
inadequate planning
says influential group
of MPs **Page 7**

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are now firmly on the
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Cuts have a cost



The FBU has been saying for a long time now that you can't keep cutting frontline fire services without any impact on community safety. New figures released by the Association of British Insurers provide the evidence that we were right.

They show that fire damage losses to commercial properties and homes hit record levels of £1.3 billion last year. These devastating facts come at a time when businesses, workers and families are already reeling from the worse economic downturn since the 1930s.

They also come at the end of four years in which fire and rescue services in England have cut back frontline emergency response to achieve a colossal £200 million in savings demanded by the Westminster Government.

Even the Audit Commission, in a recent report (see page 10), recognises the fact that fire losses have a significant negative impact on companies and local communities through loss of jobs and amenities – and that fire losses are on an upward trend.

Yet it still wants fire and rescue services to make another £200 million in savings.

It seems incapable of recognising the contradiction between its continued demands for cuts and the impact cuts have on the ability of fire services to protect the public and UK PLC. The best conclusion you can reach is that it is stupidity that brings them to propose changes that will expose communities to further risk.

For even from a financial point of view it makes no sense to seek savings on public services like the fire service that result in losses to wider society that dwarf those original savings. For the guardians of Best Value for money in public services, that sounds like very Poor Value indeed.

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Meet Dave Sibert, FBU IRMP/Fire Safety Advisor

You will be aware that the Audit Commission's budget-slashing recommendations in its December report were almost immediately endorsed by CLG.

Response times

Yet CLG is itself a mass of contradictions. It has just produced a report on a worrying increase in FRS emergency response times. Based on feedback from FRSs, the research found that the slower response of the fire service was

resulting in an additional annual loss in fire damage not far shy of £100 million for commercial buildings.

This same report found that the slower response of the fire service was caused by, among other things, a reduction in budgetary resources, loss of knowledge caused by changes to shift patterns and the shifting of firefighters away from frontline emergency response to community fire safety duties. These are all the kind of changes

recommended by the Audit Commission to achieve savings.

All firefighters know that in an emergency time is crucial. The ability of the service to deal professionally, efficiently and safely with fires and other emergencies relies on a range of factors – including the speed and weight of response. The longer a fire is left to burn without intervention the greater the risk to life and the greater the likely financial losses.

Unfortunately we still see certain policy setters seeking – in face of their own evidence – to undermine the importance of emergency intervention, including the speed of response. The battle to prevent slower and slower attendance times is a part of the wider battle to defend standards within our service.

The battle to prevent slower and slower attendance times is a part of the wider battle to defend standards within our service



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Bob Walker has a passion for shooting pheasants

LETTERS

People's Charter

Newspapers are reporting the return of groups of men waiting in car parks and on street corners for the opportunity to do work, any work, but sure to be a long day for around £2 an hour.

At the same time we see world leaders congregating in the UK for a G20 summit to come up with a solution to the 'global economic crisis'.

Am I the only one who feels that the solution will be to prop up the same discredited system which has got us into this mess? Am I the only one who feels that the same solution sees these pools of workers forced to work long hours for much less than the minimum wage?

Fortunately I am not. The Peoples Charter for Change (*Firefighter*, April 2009, page 8) is a truly inclusive solution to the financial and societal chaos we are currently experiencing and should be compulsory reading for all members and debated at branch meetings. If we don't support a 'Peoples Charter' then perhaps we deserve to live under the 'Bosses Charter'

Kevin Brown
Regional Secretary
FBU Greater Manchester

As the People's Charter for Change highlights, unemployment is escalating as a result of the global economic meltdown, a crisis caused by the neo-liberal

policies adopted by the major global economic powers that create substantial wealth for the few and poverty and injustice for the many.

Our Government continues with its knee-jerk reactions to try to combat the worst excesses of job losses. But there is one thing it could do that would save over 1,000 jobs at the stroke of a pen. The downside would be a loss of cash to private business and a potential privatisation deal. What is this thing? Scrap regional controls!

Workers in local control rooms would have stability of employment, the fire and rescue service would be able to respond to emergency incidents but EADS and their subsidiaries would lose millions, possibly billions. Let's see that equation again. "Workers Rights v Business Interests"? Go on Gordon, you know it makes sense!

John Drake
Regional Secretary
FBU South West

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STEFANO CANONNI

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow, General Secretary Matt Wrack, Tony Benn and John McDonnell MP with other campaigners outside parliament in London

Campaign launched to put people before bankers

PEOPLE'S CHARTER FOR CHANGE

Putting people before bankers in a fair and just Britain are some of the key demands of the People's Charter for Change, a major campaign launched in parliament by trade unions and other campaigners last month.

General Secretary Matt Wrack, RMT General Secretary Bob Crow and UNITE joint general secretary Tony Woodley are among a growing number of prominent supporters.

Supporters also include Saffron Burrows, Ken Loach, Max Stafford-Clark, Doreen Lawrence, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Tony Benn, Mark Steel, Professor Keith Ewing,

John Hendy QC, Peter Tatchell, Imran Khan (solicitor) as well as community campaigners.

Other key elements of the People's Charter include a demand that public sector services should remain in the public sector and that public services that have in the past been hived off to the highest bidder should be brought back into public ownership. It also calls for an end of the wars that have seen billions of pounds wasted and hundreds of thousands of lives lost.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, who spoke at the launch, said: "With the appalling economic conditions that millions of working people are now facing the time is right to assess the best way to make sure

all the people of this country get a fair deal from our government.

"It is time that we had the policies that will help the vast majority of this country and not a tiny minority from the square mile of the City of London.

"That is why this Charter and what it stands for is so important – it will deliver a verdict from the court of public opinion that demands the programmes, the policies and the investment that will support ordinary working people."

→ The aim of the Charter is to create a movement of over one million people. To sign and to read the full charter, visit www.thepeoplescharter.com/

160 per cent increase in near misses

FIREFIGHTER SAFETY

“Near miss” incidents affecting firefighters are at record or near-record levels, new figures show.

There were 2,426 incidents in England in 2007/8, an increase of 160% from 919 ten years ago. The number has exceeded 2,400 in each of the last five years.

The figures, which are not published, were revealed in a parliamentary answer (23 February 2009, [256987]).

The statistics, which cover unplanned events that did not result in injury, illness or damage but had the potential to do so, underestimate the size of the problem, because of under-reporting, says the Union.

■ The FBU has raised the issue of firefighter fatalities with the Scottish parliament, securing cross-party support for a parliamentary motion (S3M-3590 Firefighter Safety and Data Collection) that “calls for greater clarity and standardisation in the

More than 2,400 near-miss incidents have been recorded in England in the last five years

recording and investigation of firefighter fatalities and injuries and for more comprehensive safety guidance for fire authorities.”

■ General Secretary Matt Wrack attended on March 5 the first meeting of the Operational Guidance Programme Board (OGPB), which will manage the production and issuing of national operational guidance that supports firefighter safety and enhances the delivery of the fire service. Meeting three times a year, it comprises key stakeholders such as CLG, Chief Fire Rescue Advisor Sir Ken Knight and CFOA.

FBU seeking return to good industrial relations

HUMBERSIDE

Humberside FBU has launched a campaign to try to persuade the brigade's management to return to the good industrial relations that they both once enjoyed, following moves to impose policies without agreement.

There are now five disputes on this and other issues formally lodged with the chief fire officer, including imposition of a transfer policy; firefighter vacancy management; non-payment of CPD by utilising an application process outside of that agreed at the NJC; introducing ‘Community Fire Technician’ jobs performed by firefighters but not paying the agreed NJC rates of pay; and not abiding by the National Joint Council's Joint Protocol for Good Industrial Relations.

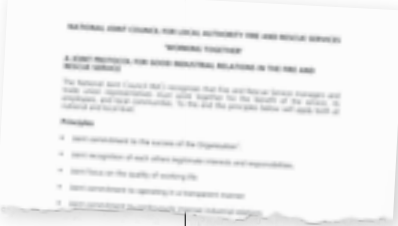
The FBU, in accordance with the

Industrial Relations Protocol, have requested the help of the NJC Joint Secretaries to try to resolve differences but these requests have been declined by Humberside management. Not only is this acting contrary to the IR Protocol, but also the Grey Book. These stipulate that neither side should unreasonably refuse such assistance.

The FBU is now carrying an extensive consultation process with FBU members prior to a ballot.

■ South Yorkshire FBU was set to notify employers of a ballot to be held in

protest at moves to impose shift changes, as *Firefighter* went to press. Fire crews in the brigade reject changes managers are threatening to impose on 4 May that they say would cause havoc with childcare and undermine their family life.



INVEST IN SAFETY
SAFER
FIREFIGHTERS
SAFER
COMMUNITIES



Sounding off!

VICKY KNIGHT

Executive Council, Women

Women in the recession

‘Women in the global recession’ was the timely theme of the 2009 TUC women's conference last month. And in this debate on the adverse impact of this catastrophic downturn on women, the FBU National Women's Committee joined hundreds of other women trade unionists assembled in Scarborough.

Recent statistics show that while women are now more likely to be in paid work, they remain far more likely to be in low paid jobs. Many of these being in part time work, exploitative, vulnerable work – in particular, jobs paid below the minimum wage, with black and disabled women suffering additional labour market discrimination. With migrant workers being increasingly scapegoated during this recession, it is clear that by failing to combat this divisive misinformation, we'll simply be handing votes to the far right.

Another by-product of growing financial concerns among families is a rise in domestic abuse. Alarming, centrally funded support



to victims and their families are also being slashed or removed completely. Housing problems for vulnerable families are on the increase with housing associations, not councils being the major providers of this social provision today. The foreseen increase in redundancies at housing associations can then only further compound the problem.

Workers cannot pay for a crisis caused by Government and the unsustainable greed-driven economic system it has overseen. “It's a crisis on equality,” said TUC general secretary Brendan Barber, as women have been proved to suffer most. Urging ministers not to put the equality agenda on the back burner because of the economic crisis, he called instead for a new deal for women, including universal access to high quality childcare and action to close the gender pay gap.

In the fire and rescue service, we have seen how the cuts agenda is now hidden behind an equality smokescreen on key working conditions such as shifts. FBU women, backed by our colleagues in the RMT, moved a motion to highlight this issue and how women and men trade unionists together should, and can fight back.

FBU steps up campaign to get anti-BNP vote out

STOP THE BNP

FBU members and officials are stepping up campaigning against the BNP as the June Euro elections approach, calling for all to use their vote on the day to stop the fascist party.

At local elections in March in Rainhill, Merseyside, the BNP's vote fell from 299 to 215, lowering the share to below the 7% previously achieved, following a campaign involving FBU North West rep Neil Thompson and local firefighter colleagues. Turnout was 38%.

However, a lower turnout at

nearby Parr saw the BNP get a higher vote.

Says Neil: "We all need to pull together in the lead up to the European Elections in June to do to stop the BNP gaining a foothold."

The campaign also involved Searchlight, Hope not Hate, Unite Against Fascism and the GMB and Unison trade unions.

Meanwhile, firefighters from Avon and Somerset joining a Searchlight South West demonstration in March successfully forced the cancellation of a BNP fundraising dinner where leader Nick Griffin was due to speak.

John Drake, the FBU's South West Regional Secretary and co-convenor of Searchlight South West, said:

"The fight against the BNP is one all firefighters should be involved in. The success of this demo shows how the BNP can be stopped if we work together with other unions and anti-racist groups.

"After all, there are many, many more of us than them and we want them to know their racist and divisive politics are not welcome wherever they raise their ugly heads."

→ Visit www.hopenothateorg.uk/

◆ The Iraqi regime is engaged in a "hostile" war against the trade union movement, vandalising its premises, freezing its bank accounts and physically assaulting union leaders, Shatha Besarani of the Iraqi Women's League told the TUC Women's conference in March. The situation for women was no better, she added. "Iraqi women are trapped in a downward spiral of poverty, desperation and gender-specific violence." Ms Besarani stressed the importance of international solidarity to help Iraqi women and trade unionists in their struggle for "free trade unions and an independent Iraq." A collection was made at the conference.

◆ "The BNP's politics of hate and division threaten the freedoms and safety of those they would see annihilated – Jews, Muslims, LGBT, black and disabled people, all ethnic minorities and trade unionists," last month's TUC Women's Conference agreed. "The BNP has stated that rape is no more serious than forcing a woman to eat chocolate and that 'some women are like gongs – they need to be struck regularly,'" stated a motion. Secretary to the FBU's Black and Ethnic Minority Members section Sam Samuels informed delegates that the FBU was committed to expel BNP members from our union.

◆ Firefighters joined thousands at a mass rally in Belfast on March 11, in order to demonstrate their utter revulsion at the recent shootings and murders in Antrim and Craigavon. Similar vigils, also called by the ICTU, were held in Derry and Newry. Again, local firefighters were present. Northern Ireland EC member Jim Barbour said: "We were saddened, shocked and sickened at the recent awful events. We totally reject the actions of this handful of dissidents. We will not sit by and allow the clock to be turned back 30 years."

◆ FBU officials Kevin Brown and Dave Chappell joined a parliamentary lobby on Gaza on 11 March to try and encourage the UK Government to alter its policy on Israel. Says Dave: "UK policy means Israel is allowed to commit serial war crimes, use massive destruction and disproportionate violence against civilians, and break more international law than you could shake a stick at." More: www.palestinecampaign.org

Union spreads best maternity practice through brigades

MATERNITY RIGHTS

Women in Staffordshire are the latest FBU members to benefit from a "Best Practice" maternity deal drawn up and championed by the National Women's Committee and backed by the union's leadership.

The deal gives women 39 weeks maternity leave at full pay followed by 13 weeks at half pay – and has already been adopted in the Isle of Wight. It is further evidence that the union's campaigning – at a time when fire chiefs are under pressure to recruit and retain more women – is starting to bear fruit.

Canny employers are seeing the benefit of treating women better – both to increase employee satisfaction and in readiness for new recruitment targets to boost the number of women in the service.

In Shropshire, for instance, a new deal including 26 weeks at full pay

has been struck. Both brigades are in the West Midlands, where Helen Harrison, NWC rep, has been persistent in seeking improvements in maternity arrangements.

Peter Dartford, Staffordshire's chief fire officer, said the new maternity policy would send out a clear message to women about how much they are valued.

Crew manager Sarah Smith (left) is the first woman to benefit from the Staffordshire deal.

She gave birth to baby Bromley, a brother for three-year-old Chester, at the end of February, and can enjoy her maternity leave without any financial pressure to return early.

Kerry Baigent, NWC secretary, said these deals were proof that more brigades were putting their money where their mouth is. "A solid maternity policy such as Staffs are providing will mean that brigades can go out and positively recruit women and those that they already employ will be retained."





MPs lash confusion, fraud and inadequate planning

Union calls for action after committee warns FRSs not properly prepared for disaster

NEW DIMENSION

The Union called for urgent Government action after an influential group of MPs warned that fire and rescue services are not properly prepared to deal with a major terrorist attack or disaster. In a report on the New Dimension programme, parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) found that staff are "confused" about who can order equipment to be deployed and that records of resources are inadequate.

The PAC also condemned management on the £330 million project designed to bring the response up to scratch in England, saying it had been left vulnerable to an £867,000 fraud and overspent on consultants.

The chairman of the committee, Edward Leigh, said the New Dimension capabilities brought in were welcome and had proved useful for incidents such as the floods of summer 2007. But there were many areas where the Department for Communities and Local Government (dCLG) needed to "get a grip".

"There is no comprehensive data on the availability of New Dimension and other equipment across the country," he said. "The department is also less than fully informed about the skills available among firefighters in all fire and rescue services to operate the new kit.

"The command and control arrangements are uncertain, with an unacceptable level of confusion among local fire and rescue services about who makes the decision to deploy the equipment. And many fire and rescue services are remiss at planning for catastrophic incidents, especially at a regional or national scale."

The report found that many plans are inadequate, especially for regional and national-scale incidents, and that there are too few large-scale practice exercises to

'The DCLG must get a grip on all of this ... It is not comfortable to contemplate the alternative'

test responses and to inform plan-making. Lessons learned from equipment deployment at real events and practice exercises are not disseminated systematically across all FRSs, it found.

"The DCLG must get a grip on all of this so that, if there is a catastrophic incident, a well-planned and co-ordinated fire and rescue operation can play its proper part in the overall emergency service response. It is not comfortable to contemplate the alternative," said Mr Leigh.

The FBU described the report as "very important" and said that it would represent "a real opportunity" if the Government

responded in the right way.

General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The Government has provided the money to buy new equipment, but it has been cutting back on the number of firefighters. They and the Audit Commission want these cuts in personnel to rapidly increase.

"Cutting firefighters does not make sense and reduces our capacity to plan, prepare and train to deal with major incidents, including terrorist incidents. Instead, fire service time and resources are being diverted to creating regional control centres which no one wants and which will make matters worse.

"This disastrous IT project is costing £1.4 billion, is years late, and is wasting a fortune of public money. This report identifies the key areas where our efforts need to be focussed.

"We have been calling for improved regional and national planning for at least three years. Give us enough training, equipment and people and we'll deal with whatever version of Armageddon terrorists throw at us.

"Firefighters just hope that at some stage Government will start listening to what everyone tells them they need to do. It is critical for public and firefighter safety that these recommendations are followed."

→ More: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmpubacc.htm

Hope not hate

BY NICK LOWLES, SEARCHLIGHT

The forthcoming European Elections could change British politics for years to come. If the fascist British National Party (BNP) win seats then they will have the financial clout, political respectability and authority to alter the political landscape.

And it will be change for the worse.

The BNP is becoming a household name. In the process it is trying to appear more moderate and respectable. But it is not. Scratch the surface and you find the same old racist organisation it always was. It is run by hardline nazis who believe that the Holocaust did not happen. Its rulebook remains firmly entrenched in the principles of racial superiority and the banning of racial integration.

The BNP may have got cleverer but its real politics remain the same.

The BNP is dedicated to imposing apartheid-style rule in Britain, with black and Asian people becoming second-class citizens under the law.

The BNP do not believe non-white people, even if they were born here, can ever really be British.

This view, along with total opposition to any integration or mixing of races, is enshrined in their constitution.

The reality of BNP politics were vividly shown during the Oldham riots which, according to a Crown Court judge, "were triggered" by BNP supporters who ran down a predominantly Asian street smashing windows and attacking people. These men were given a standing ovation at the next BNP branch meeting.

Today, the BNP is trying to exploit the

economic downturn. It blames immigrants and migrant workers for all of our economic problems.

Of course this is nonsense. The crisis was caused by greedy fat cat bankers. Indeed, without immigration an economic crisis would have happened far sooner.

The NHS would have collapsed, as would many other businesses where foreign-born workers have plugged vital skill shortages in this country.

Foreign born workers contribute far more to the UK economy than they take out, but these facts don't interest the BNP. Nor the fact that 5.5 million Britons live and work abroad. Can you imagine the outcry if foreign countries did what the BNP proposed?

The BNP is running a British Jobs for British Workers campaign. It is vital



that people are not fooled by this. Their policies would devastate the British economy. Millions of Britons are reliant for employment from foreign-owned firms. If the BNP booted all non-whites and foreigners out of the country then why wouldn't all these foreign-owned companies pull out?

Then there are the hundreds of thousands of British workers who are reliant on British companies winning overseas contracts. If it's British jobs for British workers then would the BNP support the American aviation industry withdrawing all work from British Aerospace and Rolls Royce?

We live in a global economy which is complex and intertwined. What we need is for workers to enjoy uniform rights and conditions across Europe and for people to be paid the rate for the job in the country

the work is being carried out. This is how we stop exploitation and undercutting, not racial scapegoating.

The HOPE not hate campaign has been established to take on the BNP. With the support of the FBU we recently produced a Union Toolkit, to help unions defeat fascism and racism in the workplace.

We are also running a huge campaign to prevent the BNP from winning seats in the European Parliament. We are establishing groups across the country and working with unions to develop tailored campaigns for their members. We have even linked up with Blue State Digital, the online company which ran Barack Obama's internet operation. In just seven weeks we have signed up over 22,000 people to the HOPE not hate campaign.

On Friday 15 May we are organising Union Friday, a day when union branches will be encouraged to deliver an anti-BNP message to their members.

We are also holding Days of Action in as many towns and cities across the country, through which we will distribute almost two million newspapers and leaflets.

We are building a massive grassroots campaign but we cannot do it alone. The BNP will only be defeated if everyone plays their part and that is why we are asking everyone who hates the BNP and its politics of hate to give us just one hour of their time. If everyone does that then we can defeat the fascists.

→ For more about the HOPE not hate campaign and to sign up, visit: www.hopenothate.org.uk

JESS HURD



New figures show fires losses suffered by businesses and homes are hitting record levels, further undermining claims by the Audit Commission that cuts to fire services can be achieved without undermining the level of service provided to communities.

The cost of fire damage hit a new high of £1.3 billion last year, or £3.4 million every day, according to the Association of British Insurers.

Losses in 2008 rose by 16% on 2007, with commercial fire damage up 15% on the previous year to £865 million and fire damage to homes up 17% to £408 million. School fires alone cost £33 million, with a serious school fire occurring every month on average.

The FBU warned these figures demonstrated that now was not the time for a further £200 million round of cuts to England's FRSS, recommended by the Audit Commission in a recent report endorsed by the Government.

The Union believes the £200 million cuts

April 2008, Manchester warehouse fire



already pushed through by fire authorities in 2004-2008 at the behest of the Audit Commission has contributed to the record fire losses.

Longer response times

And the Union isn't the only one reaching this conclusion. A recent CLG commissioned report* points to increased fire service response times in England, which have been recorded over a number of years. This, it estimates was causing an additional annual fire damage loss of around £85 million for hotels, factories, shops and other commercial buildings.

This report, based on feedback from

AUDIT COMMISSION: "SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN INSURED COMMERCIAL FIRE LOSS"

"Fires can result in significant business losses. Even a relatively minor fire at crucial stages of production can mean large losses for individual firms. Business interruption or even closure can have a significant effect on local communities through loss of jobs and amenities. There has been a significant increase in the insured commercial loss from fire from £521 million in 2000 to £753 million in 2007. (Fire and rescue performance assessment - scores and analysis of fire and rescue authorities' performance 2008, paragraph 26).

fire and rescue services, found that slowing response times in turn were caused by a reduction in budgetary resources, loss of knowledge caused by changes to shift patterns and moving firefighters away from emergency response to community fire safety duties. These are all cost-cutting measures recommended by the Audit Commission and endorsed by government.

Says General Secretary Matt Wrack:

"These new figures are deeply concerning and just confirm what we've been saying for years.

"Cuts to frontline fire services do have a cost.

"Anyone who knows anything about fire knows delays in fire service response means a fire burns longer. And the longer a fire burns the greater the damage to property.

"Even the Audit Commission is aware of the rising fire losses in recent years and the dire consequences this has on businesses and local communities.

"And yet, in the midst of the worse recession since the 1930s, with soaring unemployment and bankruptcies it is recommending another massive round of cuts by England's fire services.

"It beggars belief that the Government should be taking advice from this bunch of clearly confused and over-paid consultants."

"Ministers need to take urgent heed of what the professionals in the service are saying: its time to stop the cuts."

Fire deaths up

Growing financial loss is not the only concern raised by the new figures.

In commenting on what he described as "alarming" figures, Nick Starling, ABI's Director of General Insurance and Health, said: "Insurers are reporting a rise in large-scale fires that are increasingly putting lives at risk."

Separate new statistics published by Communities and Local Government underline such concerns about community safety.

Fire deaths increased, year-on-year, for two consecutive quarters in the last three months of 2007 and first three months of 2008, hitting 146 and 147 respectively, according to the Fire Statistics Monitor, published in February,

The number of people who died in dwelling fires rose in January-March 2008 to 124, a rate last exceeded three years ago.

→ * "Review of Fire and Rescue Service response times" Read the full report on: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/frsresponsetimes



Providing adequate toilets, locker rooms and showers for all men and women in the fire service is now firmly on the agenda. And there are already breakthroughs to celebrate.

It's been a long time coming. But the campaign to give all firefighters the dignity at work they deserve has finally moved from the margins to the mainstream. Providing adequate toilets, locker rooms and showers for all men and women in the fire service is now firmly on the agenda.

There are even breakthroughs to celebrate. Enlightened fire authorities are ditching their misguided enthusiasm for "unisex" facilities. And the first ever "dignity" vehicles in UK fire and rescue services should be out on the run soon. These trailblazing welfare vehicles – one in Avon, one in Strathclyde – provide crews with separate male and female toilets and somewhere to take a break, rest and snack during the long hours spent tackling major incidents.

Mobile workplace

For as every frontline firefighter knows, it's not just about the station, it's about the workplace. The fire-ground, flood-site or stretch of road coned-off following a traffic pile-up becomes the workplace. Toilets are not generally provided. But these dignity vehicles show that they can be if fire and rescue services are prepared to invest in staff welfare away from the station.

John McGhee, national officer for health, safety and welfare acknowledges that women in the union have led the way in pressing for dignified facilities. "Men have had to put up

with peeing against a wall for too long. Decent facilities benefit both men and women – at the station and at the incident ground."

Men are also speaking out. At the union's conference last year, Brian Gibson, a crew manager from Cleveland, made a memorable call for more facilities at the incident ground. In a well received speech, he told of how a female colleague had needed to change her sanitary protection, and had to do so at the back of a fire engine while a trusted male colleague stood guard. Facilities at the fire-ground, he argued, would give dignity to both male and female firefighters.

The National Women's Committee, with a rep from every region, has campaigned very effectively for better facilities. The Best Practice guide it produced together with the FBU Health and Safety Committee, is aimed at securing separate, dignified toilets, showers

and locker rooms for all firefighters on stations and beyond.

Unisex misnomer

As women make up just 3 per cent of the workforce, unisex facilities are a misnomer. As Kerry Baigent, secretary of the NWC puts it: "A unisex locker room with 15 men in it is a male locker room. Many women – and a good few men – won't feel comfortable using it". The document, endorsed by the union's executive late last year, provides union reps with a negotiating toolkit to get a better deal for all firefighters, giving them the privacy and dignity they deserve.

Denise Christie, a firefighter based at Tollcross station in Edinburgh, has struck a good few deals herself, since becoming National Women's Committee rep for Scotland two years ago. She believes pressing for change through decision making forums where union reps and management thrash out how to improve equality at work is the most likely route for making gains. "It's at that level where you can get decisions agreed and acted on," says Denise, a strong advocate of getting in at the design stage when new buildings or refurbishments are planned.

Denise has recruited women's reps in five of Scotland's eight fire services. The results speak for themselves. Mixed overnight rest areas have now been scrapped in Grampian, after women reps told management female

'Some toxins are absorbed through the skin, potentially triggering illnesses. People should be showering and changing their underclothes as well as their work clothes'

WIDENING DIGNITY

FOR ALL

staff were sleeping on toilet floors rather than share rest rooms with men on night shifts. All wholetime stations in the region now have separate designated rest rooms.

In Lothian and Borders management have done a u-turn on unisex facilities and are working towards separate showers, toilets and locker rooms for women and men. In Strathclyde, the FRS has agreed to source welfare packs – including sanitary towels, tampons and wipes – for every appliance in the brigade, following a spirited presentation by FBU women's rep Sharon Sales-Mossop. It's a dignity "win" welcomed by Alex Miller, Strathclyde brigade secretary. After 28 years in the service he's relishing the arrival, at last, of the dignity vehicle for the area – and is hopeful the FRS will provide another.

There have been other successes in the fight for adequate and appropriate facilities. In Avon, management has backed off from imposing unisex facilities at its training centre which serves Somerset and Gloucestershire too. In Durham the FRS has scrapped plans for unisex facilities at its new stations. In Kent a new FRS director dropped her predecessor's plan for unisex facilities. In all cases, union reps had made their opposition to the plans clear.

Men have also benefited directly from facilities audits drafted by the National Women's Committee. In Staffordshire men's facilities at one station were found to be so run down that they were given a priority upgrade.

There are many reasons why improving facilities for everyone has moved up the agenda of both the union and enlightened employers, underpinned by the government's drive to get more women in the service. Ministers want FRS's to ensure that 15 per cent of new trainees and transfers are female

by 2013. These would-be trainees won't want to share locker rooms – and unisex facilities will certainly deter under-represented Muslim people from applying.

Inadequate facilities

The summer floods of 2007 threw the spotlight on firefighters working long hours in arduous conditions without adequate facilities – often far from home. The roll out of the New Dimension programme has also helped focus minds on the need to provide proper facilities for crews on the move over long distances.

Lack of adequate facilities or access to showers could even damage firefighters' health, John McGhee warns. "We know

that some fire retardant toxins are absorbed through the skin and are not just inhaled or ingested, with the potential to trigger skin conditions and other illnesses. People should be showering and changing their underclothes as well as their work clothes."

There have been a number of changes for the better – but it's certainly no time for complacency. Vigilance and persistence pay off. Denise Christie makes a point of canvassing the views of women affected by any proposed changes, collecting their views and presenting them to management. Such evidence-based presentations have certainly impressed management in Lothian and Borders. **Watch this space.**

Avon's trailblazing mobile welfare vehicle



The Government's latest National Business Case shows costs will exceed £1.4 billion and leaves many questions unanswered, finds the IPF.

Costs up, savings down, yet more delays

FACT

The annual cost of renting the largely empty and under-used RCC buildings will soon be hitting £13.2 million

The South West regional control centre building in Taunton, Somerset

A new analysis by the Institute of Public Finance of the latest FireControl Business Case (November 2008) has confirmed project costs have escalated to £1.4 billion and rising, despite continued claims by Government that it is costing just £380 million.

Savings have been slashed from 30%, or £25 million in 2006 to 11%, or £8 million in 2008, and they may fall further, the report finds. And affordability remains a concern at the local and regional level and can only be sustained by "resilience payments," while longer term savings are also uncertain.

The independent IPF report, commissioned by the FBU, finds there are increased project costs. But to make sense they will be met by further staff reductions. So "savings" hinge on how robust a staffing model there will be in practice. But staffing costs are "impossible to accurately forecast" by the

CLG's own admission in the Business Case.

After staffing, it is the massive cost of new buildings to house the regional control rooms that is swelling the bill. The IPF underlines its original assessment that the property deal entered into by Government does not represent best value for money.

Meanwhile, a number of key areas carrying "potential costs for FRSs" were still not even being taken into account, remaining "out of scope".

The report also raises concerns over the ever lengthening timetable for roll-out of a project that has been beset by delays. It notes that there was "practically no further room for slippage," as following the latest nine month delay a new national cut-over date is for Spring 2012, very close to the summer Olympics.

Says FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack: "This new independent IPF report

confirms what the Union has been saying from the outset of the FireControl Project: the Government has exaggerated savings and underestimated the true costs of the Project. It over simplified the technical challenges and under-estimated the timescale needed to implement those proposals. FireControl will not result in the promised better system, nor will it be cheaper."

"Government has already sneaked through changes which will allow standard 999 telecoms operators to filter and queue calls to the fire service at very busy periods. After spending in excess of £1.4 billion on a new regional control system the public could get the message 'The fire service is busy at the moment... please call back later'.

"If a great new system was coming on stream that would not be necessary. The Union does not accept such a response is a better or a more modern way of doing

THE IPF ON THE LATEST NATIONAL BUSINESS CASE

COSTS

"The total cost now exceeds £1,400m including elements arising from the New Dimension extra inputs and the extended timescale included in the analysis." (paragraph 1.12)

"Annual efficiency savings on the control service costed at £21m (or 28% of the annual running costs of the current control centres) have now been reduced to £8m (11%) or £145 per 1000 head of population." (paragraph 1.11)

"The evaluation of options indicates that the Property Developer Scheme (PDS) may prove more costly than a fragmented build and fit out by the Crown. Some of these costs have been committed and are now a part of the ongoing operational costs and reduce the original savings estimates...The analysis doesn't alter our earlier report conclusions that value for money is not proven. A subsequent project audit may be able to assess the impact of the changed property market conditions on the value for money achieved by these decisions. (Appendix N: Commercial Deal)

"Clearly although this option is more affordable, it does not represent the best value for money. (Appendix J: Economic Effect from Adopting a Private Developer Scheme (PDS))

"The following continue to be Out of Scope for the FiReControl Project: Fire and Rescue Control Services in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However, Scotland and Wales have the opportunity to join FiReControl; The disposal, re-use or refurbishment of existing fire and rescue control rooms made obsolete by the creation of the RCCs; Interim upgrades to existing control room infrastructure required before transition to the new solutions

"The FBC does not identify the costs associated with the 'out of scope' activities. Therefore it would aid transparency to review 'out of scope' activities and potential costs for FRS's." (Appendix R: Project Scope)

DELAYS

"With the London Olympics in Summer 2012 there is practically no further room for slippage." (paragraph 1.6)

LOCATION

"To a layman it is not certain that the location of the RCCs is right to be aligned with the Government offices or what will happen if further centres become necessary." (paragraph 3.6)

"It is not apparent that there has been any learning or testing as to whether there are options for further RCCs or building up of other existing control rooms that might have achieved a better solution. (paragraph 4.4)

STAFFING

"The key questions are around staff numbers in the LACCs, requirements for maternity and paternity leave cover, how numbers change through transition, and any allowance for management overhead. At paragraph 372 the FBC admits it is impossible to accurately forecast numbers and costs hence the case remains indicative.... (Appendix T: Regional Control Centre (RCC) staffing assumptions)

"In its opening paragraph it also reveals the inherent tension that has been present in the development of the business case between the fact that "The staffing number for Regional Control Centres (RCC) control rooms is the single most important assumption in the business case" and that it is "up to the LACCs to decide actual staff numbers...The fact that the LACCs will have some autonomy to set shift and roster parameters limits the accuracy of the model and raises questions as to what will happen locally when proposals are examined. A comparison and check is needed against current working practices to confirm the appropriateness of the assumptions made. (Appendix U: Staffing Model Detail)

*IPF Independent Review of National Business Case (November 2008) for the FiReControl Project

things."

"This enormous spending is at a time of a tremendous squeeze on FRS budgets. And Government refuses to provide the money to help the fire service respond safely and effectively to major flooding incidents.

"The spending on FireControl is out of all proportion to overall fire service budgets and has been an enormous diversion of time, effort and resources which could have been better spent.

"There is no evidence FireControl will deliver measureable benefits to either the public or firefighters. Scotland and Wales will get most of the additional functionality through the FireLink Project, and without the need for FireControl.

"We believe that fire and rescue authorities are being asked to sign-up to a project which was ill-thought out and poorly costed since its initiation. It remains so."





WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Dave Sibert FBU IRMP/Fire Safety Advisor

It's a big job and one that keeps one of the newest recruits to the FBU national team pretty busy. For Dave Sibert, now a year into the role of IRMP/Fire Safety Advisor, there's never a dull moment, as he puts his specialist knowledge built up over 26 years – 15 of them in fire safety at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and four at the Fire Protection Association (FPA) – at the service of FBU members.

With the Audit Commission having recently issued a major report calling for a massive £200 million of cuts to English FRs and serious concerns about deteriorating firefighter safety, it's also a job that's going to be at the heart of any concerted fight back.

"Integrated risk management planning and fire safety permeate practically every decision in the fire service. As the Union's Fire Safety/IRMP advisor, virtually anything could arrive on my desk," says Dave. "My job is to use every opportunity to raise the issue of firefighter safety, whether it's a matter of inadequate establishment levels, training or guidance, or risks of increasing fires in timber-framed buildings."

Dave, a graduate fire engineer, was not just hired in April 2008 for his technical skills. A long-time member, he was FBU branch chair at Carlton Fire Station during the national dispute in 2004 and has

'I use every opportunity to raise the issue of firefighter safety, whether it's a matter of inadequate staffing, training or guidance, or fires in timber-framed buildings'

supported fellow members in a variety of roles – in health and safety at branch and brigade level and as IRMP co-ordinator for Nottinghamshire.

"There are some similarities between my job now and when I was at the FPA," says Dave. "I was advising the insurance industry on reducing property fire losses. Success in this brings broad benefits to society. But – and I can say this having experience as an FBU rep – it's definitely more rewarding to

focus on protecting people, the public and our members."

Dave is based near Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire, a short walk from Wellesbourne fire station where FBU members were devastated by the loss of four of their colleagues when they attended the fire at Atherstone On Stour in November 2007.

It is from here that Dave focuses on protecting those who risk their lives protecting others. Pay him a visit and you will invariably find Dave at his desk, sifting through thick policy documents, or at his computer responding to requests for assistance from local and national officials. Over the past year, Dave has provided advice on several brigade IRMPs and fired out over the email system his input into a whole series of fire safety issues where the FBU has – or should have – its say.

But he gets out and about too. He's on the road – actually he mostly travels by rail – typically three days a week, pressing the flesh and putting the Union's view across at every forum he attends.

Scotland and London are key destinations, not only to touch base with senior FBU representatives, but for meetings with ministers and civil servants, as well as other influential parties in the fire service, or with a strong interest in it – such as insurers.

Dave's a regular at Communities and Local Government sponsored 'stakeholder' gatherings such as the Practitioners' Forum and the Business and Community Safety Forum (BCSF) and the CLG IRMP Steering Board. One upcoming project he is involved in is a British Standards committee that will



review the way fire service response interacts with fire engineered buildings. Another ongoing project is to ensure that IRMPs fully embrace any new safety critical operational guidance (See page 5)

"Governments have a duty to listen to us on a range of issues. And where we are not formally consulted we will seek to get our views across anyway. What's important is to maintain the profile of the Union by being in the right place, at the right time and at the right level to influence people to ensure the FBU voice is listened to. That's a big part of my job."

But aren't many of the events the FBU is invited to just talking shops? Dave would not necessarily disagree. The paperwork is received in advance by email and you can still make a contribution without attending. And the degree of influence the FBU succeeds in exercising can vary widely. "You have to be selective, but there's a value in getting together – talking before the meeting, getting somebody to one side over tea," he says.

Dave is an employee of the Union and, as such, he is part of a team and accountable within the FBU's structures, he says. He reports to the Union's National IRMP Board, which discusses and proposes to the ruling Executive Council strategies related to integrated risk management planning. Dave also works with officers' representatives in the Officers National Committee who are charged with dealing with fire safety matters through a special working group, the fire safety sub-committee.

"It's a cliché, but the best results come when you work as a team," says Dave. "I unfortunately don't have time to respond to all requests for assistance as my role is a strategic advisor but I do encourage officials to contact me as long as they don't mind a quick "informal" answer.

"Keeping in touch with local issues means that when I'm next round the table with

'IRMPs and fire safety permeate practically every decision in the fire service. Virtually anything could arrive on my desk'

civil servants, elected members or senior managers, I'm armed with real examples of what is happening on the ground. And, as I tell them, on the frontline it's often not as rosy as they would have us believe."

Dave admits that he is "still getting his feet under the table", but has had to hit the ground running. "We've a fight on our hands to make sure the safety of firefighters and emergency fire control staff is considered in all major decisions about the fire service. And this is a fight on behalf of FBU members I am pleased to be part of."

Working For You



STEWART BROWN

G&L Executive Council Member

It is now four years since the National Gay and Lesbian Committee (NGLC) first looked to Stonewall's Diversity Champions Programme as a way of improving the lot of gay and lesbian FBU members. This excellent scheme works with public and private sector employers sharing good practice on issues of sexual orientation in the workplace.

With the support of the then fire minister and his department, brigades were urged to sign up. Today 25 fire and rescue services participate. Once again in February this year the NGLC and the FBU enlisted the backing of the minister, Sadiq Khan, who ensured that once again a fire service circular was issued to encourage the remaining brigades to participate.

In support of this call, the minister argued that if FRSs are to attract and recruit the best people from the widest pool of talent then everyone must know that they are welcome, that there is equality of opportunity and they will be treated with dignity and respect. Their sexual orientation, he said, is an irrelevance.

Alone, the minister and Stonewall will not be able to eradicate the persistent homophobia in the fire service identified by a CLG survey last year. If we want to see a better fire service for all members, the Union has a central role to play. So do FBU members, recognising the reality that today's workforce comes from a diverse range of backgrounds, including the gay and lesbian community.

At least 6% of the UK population is estimated to be either lesbian or gay. It is likely then that of the 55,000 employees in the UK Fire Service, at least 3,000 are from this grouping – and a large percentage will be FBU members.

Gay and lesbian members deserve to be represented on an equal footing with all members and it is our duty to protect them. Yet there have been some instances recently where fire service personnel have not felt protected and have left the Union, or sought advice outside the Union. Clearly both are unacceptable.

As a trade union, we cannot let members down and give up on them when we know we can do better. And we must always fight against those who seek to divide us by picking on a particular group of members. For unity is strength.

Itching to live a normal life

One in 12 adults suffers from a condition that is a lot more than just dry skin

ECZEMA

As any one who has eczema in their family will be well aware it is a debilitating skin condition which at its worst can make your life almost unbearable. Often perceived as a childhood complaint, eczema can affect people of all ages. While about two thirds of eczema sufferers will grow out of their eczema by puberty that leaves a significant number of people who retain it for life. Currently about one in 12 adults and one in five children in the UK have eczema and they will know that it can have a severe impact on day-to-day life but, sadly, it is often dismissed as nothing more than a bit of dry skin.

There are different types of eczema, which can vary from mild to severe with common symptoms being dry, hot and itchy skin that can become broken, raw and bleeding. Above all, it is the itchiness – that produces an urge to scratch – which can be most unbearable. Although eczema can look sore and

KEY POINTS:

- ◆ moisturise, moisturise, moisturise
- ◆ more severe eczema might require treatment with topical steroids
- ◆ see your doctor to assess the severity of the eczema

unpleasant, it is not catching, although, even today, many people seem to think that it is.

Causes unknown

Unfortunately, the causes of eczema are currently unknown, although in its most common form, atopic eczema, it appears to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Atopic eczema tends to run in families and is one of a group of related atopic conditions, which also include asthma and hay fever.

For some people environmental factors such as using soap, perfumed products or simply exposure to water are major triggers. For others it may be that exposure to house-dust mites or pollen which are the culprits.

Stress can also play its part as well as

diet. But what is absolutely certain is that eczema is a very individual condition and what works to alleviate the symptoms for one person may not for another.

Sadly there is no cure for eczema: this is not a condition with a quick fix. Identifying your particular trigger factors, to the extent possible, can be helpful but is rarely a complete solution. It's not all gloom and doom though. Eczema does usually respond well to treatment.

Repair your skin barrier

The key to a successful eczema treatment regime is moisturise, moisturise, moisturise. If you have eczema your skin is much drier than other people's. As a result skin, this hugely important and often overlooked organ, does not work as well as it should. Our skin is our barrier against the outside world. It stops allergens and irritants, a bit like a brick wall. At least it should do. But if you have eczema that barrier, the brick wall, is not as strong as it should be. The mortar is crumbling and in some places has long since been washed away.

So when the allergen or the irritants hit your skin, they don't just bounce off. Instead they go through the barrier and set off a reaction – hence the unbearable itching. The frequent and generous use of emollients (the medical term for moisturisers) helps repair that skin barrier by helping your skin to retain moisture.

Don't ignore it

Milder eczema may be controlled by emollients alone, but more severe eczema might require treatment with topical steroids in order to address the inflammation. It is best not to ignore eczema and hope it will go away, as it will not.

Instead, recognise that it needs treating and see your doctor to assess the severity of the eczema, where it occurs and prescribe the strength of any topical steroid accordingly.

Getting your treatments prescribed is the first step. Making sure that you know how and when to use them is equally important. At the National Eczema Society, we have a wealth of experience in helping people with eczema live their lives. Maybe we can help you?

→ Call our Free helpline on – 0800 089 1122, e email helpline@eczema.org or just visit us at www.eczema.org



As many as one in five children suffer from eczema – keeping the skin moisturised is vital

Time off for H&S reps

Q I am a health and safety rep but my brigade is refusing me time off to allow me to fulfil my duties and for training. Is this legal?

A Along with the duty to consult with and to provide safety reps with reasonable facilities and assistance, an employer has a duty to give a union safety rep paid time off to carry out their duties, including to undergo training.

An elected safety rep who is denied paid time off to carry out their duties may have an employment tribunal claim, provided that they lodge it within three months of the employer's failure to grant the request.

Speak to your FBU rep straight away and together make sure that your brigade is appraised of the statutory rights of safety reps as set down in the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, otherwise known as the SRSC regs or "Brown Book" and the two HSE codes of practice on safety reps and committees and time off for training (1978).

These set down the rights and responsibilities of trade union safety reps and the duties that employers have, not only to allow safety reps to take reasonable time off to fulfil their duties, but also to consult them on the introduction of any measure in the workplace that may substantially affect the health and safety of employees.

These include:

- the information they must give employees on risks to health and safety and preventative measures
- planning and organisation of health and safety training
- the health and safety consequences of the introduction of new technology.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Sabbatical

Q I would like to take a sabbatical. What are my rights and how does it work?

A As with flexible working, parental and carers' leave, the adoption of career breaks is encouraged by the NJC. However, there is no specific policy on career breaks so it is advisable to check with your FBU rep what policy your brigade has, if any.

Parental leave

Q I am a father of two children who are aged two and three. Am I entitled to take 13 weeks parental leave for each child and if so can it be taken in the same year and is it paid?

A Parental leave is unpaid. You can take a total of up to 13 weeks' parental leave for each of your children up until their fifth birthday. However, you cannot

take more than four weeks' leave for any one child in a year, unless your employer agrees otherwise. Parental leave usually has to be taken in blocks of full weeks, based on your usual working pattern. The Grey Book deals with parental leave in Section 4, Part D paragraphs 49 to 54. Check with your FBU rep what parental leave arrangements are in place in your Brigade.

Carer's leave

Q What is the difference between carer's leave and parental leave?

A People with caring responsibilities for someone other than their own or adopted child, an elderly or sick relative, for instance, may have the right to paid or unpaid carers' leave. This is also dealt with in the Grey Book in Sec 4 Part D paragraphs 56 to 59. Ask your FBU rep what arrangements your brigade has.

Carers, like parents, will usually have the right to take reasonable time off in the event of an emergency, such as a breakdown in care arrangements or the person who is cared for falling ill or having an accident. Leave would not normally be allowed to be taken for more than a few days. Carers can also apply to work flexibly.

Flexible working

Q I have children aged 10 and 14. I understand changes to the law mean that I can now apply for flexible working arrangements. Is this right?

A Currently employees with caring responsibilities of children aged up to six (18 and under where the child is disabled) and carers of adults have the statutory right to request to work flexibly. From April the right to request flexible working was extended to parents of children aged 16 and under.

There is a process you must follow when applying for flexible working. It has to be in writing and should include information about the benefits flexible working will bring you and your employer. Your application must be made well in advance of when you want to change your working pattern, it must confirm that you have responsibility for the children and your relationship to them and it must set out the flexible working pattern that you wish to adopt.

When detailing what effect you believe the new working pattern will have on your employer you should suggest how this might be dealt with. If in the future you want to vary your flexible working pattern, you must make a new application.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

'It's very much a local shoot for local people'

Bob Walker has taken to country pursuits since moving from London to Devon seven years ago. He even organised the local pheasant shoot syndicate last year – not something he was likely to achieve when working out of Soho fire station

Bob Walker has really taken to country pursuits since moving from London to Devon seven years ago. He even organised the local pheasant shoot syndicate last year – not something he was likely to achieve when working out of Soho fire station.

Bob sees his local pheasant shoot as very much part of the country way of life – far removed from the image of loaded city bankers paying megabucks to for a weekend of hunting, shooting and fishing. "It's not expensive. Our shoot is a fairly low-key affair, we do all the work ourselves, syndicate members live locally and people do all kinds of jobs," says Bob, FBU chair for Devon and Somerset, who is also a member of Green Watch in Barnstaple. "The shooting season runs from November to February – but we put the work in all year round – feeding the birds, looking after them and making sure they don't wander off onto other people's land."

Some fellow firefighters are also involved – and a retired member helps clear the woods in readiness for a shoot. Bob, who has been in the fire service for 19 years, sees pheasant shooting as part of country ways that help to conserve the land and keep traditions, and the local economy, alive.

Since moving to Devon, he has bought and trained a gun dog – a "must have" for those who want to shoot game for sport. It soon got him invited along to shoots. It is a German short-haired pointer – and an

"HPR" dog. The initials provide a pretty accurate job description of the dog's instinctive duties when the guns – members of the shooting syndicate – are out. They stand for hunt, point and retrieve.

Bob explains how driven shooting works: "Out in the woods, the dog uses his nose to identify where the bird is. I can then ask him to go in and push the bird out, so it flies up from the ground. It's quite a lazy bird really and would rather walk than fly. That's why dogs are involved – to get them up in the air."

Shooting a bird takes some skill

In driven shooting, while the birds are flushed out in the woods with dogs, the guns – the shooting party – are down in the valley, ready to take aim as they fly high above. Bob says it is not that easy to shoot a bird. "It takes some skill as they fly so high. It's not as if they are on the end of a gun."

He reckons shoots have helped to preserve the species. "The birds are well-fed on grain

MAIN PICTURES: PAUL BOX



BOB WALKER

Bob Walker combines a keenness for traditional country pursuits with being Devon and Somerset chair of the FBU



Members of Bob's shooting syndicate live locally



throughout the year. They are well looked after. If it wasn't for the fact that people shot them, they would probably get knocked down by cars as they walked across roads."

For Bob, conservation and maintaining country traditions are part of the appeal. "We make the most of everything down here. I can do things that I never had the opportunity to do in London. It's broadened my horizons." He also enjoys sailing and fly-fishing – again pursuits not easily available in London.

Bob and other syndicate members can also turn hunter-gatherers – going on a shoot and then eating the "game" later. It's a direct relationship with food that bypasses the supermarket cellophane wrapper and the best-before date. Bob is quite keen on it.

The Thatched Inn, a pub not far from the shoot, serves up game shot by the syndicate. And it's not always pheasant on the menu. If pigeons have been shot, they could well end up as pigeon paté once the pub's chef has got to work. Bob has sensed a renewed interest

in game recently – partly attributable, he reckons, to television programmes exploring how birds and animals that used to be eaten more frequently are killed and cooked.

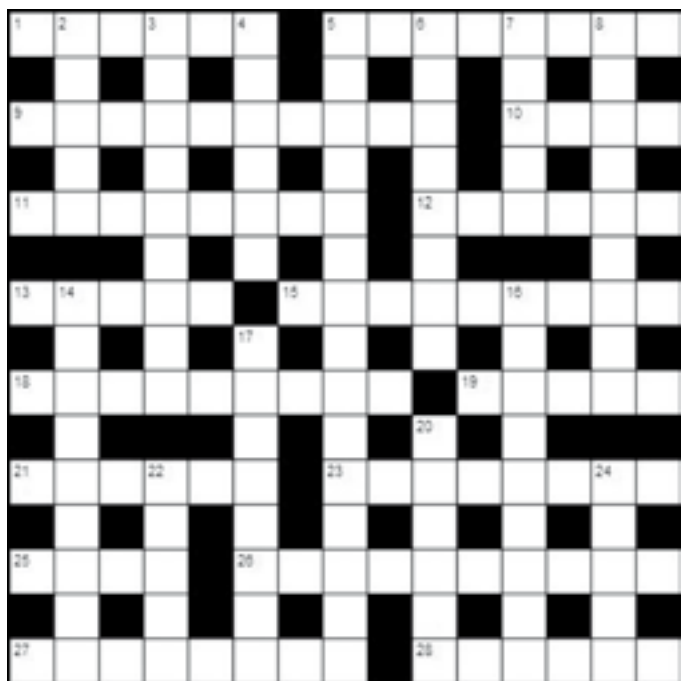
"Ours is very much a local shoot for local people – wives, partners and families come along," he says. "It's very much a family affair. It's a nice day out in winter."

Family live half a mile from the shoot

Bob has family news himself. He has recently become a father – his partner gave birth to triplets on Valentine's Day. As they were born prematurely, James, Daisy and Ella spent many weeks in hospital with their mother and were there as *Firefighter* went to press. Bob says they are doing fine.

The family home is just half a mile from the shoot and even closer to the pub where pheasant and pigeon are served. The triplets are far too young for game terrine or pigeon pie, of course – but they will probably get a taste for the countryside if they grow up there.

Quick Crossword

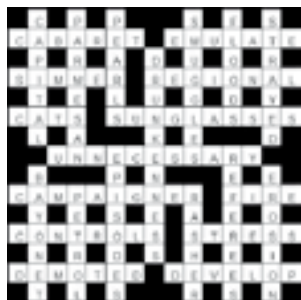


ACROSS

- 1 Basic bit of kit, with rungs (6)
- 5 Take this on holiday (8)
- 9 Maimed, scarred (10)
- 10 Roman god of war; planet (4)
- 11 Reduction in rank (8)
- 12 Nut (6)
- 13, 19 It saves lives (5,5)
- 15 Next to, especially vessel (9)
- 18 Makers, growers, impresarios - or 1968 Mel Brooks comedy (9)
- 19 See 13
- 21 Naval paymaster (6)
- 23 Christmas time - originally pagan festival (8)
- 25 There's no 13 without it, they say (4)
- 26 Guts, entrails (10)
- 27 Precious metal (8)
- 28 Snails have them - slugs don't (6)

DOWN

- 2 Nimble (5)
- 3 Sacked from priesthood (9)
- 4 Win back (6)
- 5 Eurotunnel is going to get one after September's fire (9,6)
- 6 Improper, obscene (8)
- 7 Sleeps under canvas (5)
- 8 Give up (9)
- 14 Mammal with pouch (9)
- 16 Game (or diamond) for one (9)
- 17 Arachnid with pincers and a nasty sting in the tail (8)
- 20 Shuts - cul-de-sacs (6)
- 22 It gets up one's nose! (5)
- 24 Abide - hang around (5)



Solution to March 2009 crossword, left

Winner of the January/February 2009 quiz
Ms Astridge of Hertfordshire

Answers to March 2009 Firefighter Quiz

- 1 Rome; 2 Amsterdam; 3 Barcelona;
- 4 Lisbon; 5 Liverpool; 6 Budapest

WIN!

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE

4

Prize Quiz

Win a years supply of cinema tickets!



1

1 Who's the actor who stars in 'The Graduate' with Anne Bancroft?

- a Paul Newman
- b Robert Redford
- c Peter O'Toole
- d Dustin Hoffman

2 Which actor played the lead alongside Leonardo di Caprio in 'Gangs of New York'?

- a Russell Crowe
- b Daniel Day Lewis
- c Tom Cruise
- d Richard E Grant

3 Who is the missing 'Usual Suspect' from this line up: Steve Baldwin, Benicio del Toro, Gabriel Byrne and Kevin Pollak

- a Kevin Costner
- b Geoffrey Rush
- c Jack Nicholson
- d Kevin Spacey

4 Name the 1994 BAFTA winning film starring Uma Thurman

- a The Godfather
- b Pulp Fiction
- c Goodfellas
- d Once upon a time in America

5 Which comedy actor voiced the character Shrek

- a Eddie Murphy
- b Chris Rock
- c Mike Myers
- d Robin Williams



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HOW TO ENTER

To win a pair of tickets each month for a year please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 April 2009 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (April 2009) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Mismanaged



The DCLG Select Committee has some good things to say about the department in its review of the annual report. But it is also highly critical. The select committee used words like “poorly managed”, “mismanaged” and “incompetent” to describe some policies and events.

CLG does not like advice and suggestions it does not agree with. As the select committee pointed out on one simple issue of funding which arose in the aftermath of the 2007 summer floodings: “The Minister’s [John Healey] somewhat ill-considered and over-hasty initial response to the [Audit] Commission’s recommendations may simply have reflected the perceived need for an instant riposte to any apparent criticism. It may also, however, reflect the weakness identified by successive capability reviews in the department’s willingness and ability to base its policies consistently on the evidence, rather than preconceptions.”

Incompetence



But what about looking after money? The select committee highlights what CLG called “financial corrections” imposed by the European Commission as a result of concerns about the management of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grants.

The select committee says a financial correction “is in practice a fine imposed by the Commission on the UK because of a failure properly to account for funds allocated to it by the EU.” The first fine of €25 million would be met by central Government, the Department said, and “no projects will lose out”.

But the European Commission looked into other programmes and CLG identified potential ‘fines’ of £8 million and make provision to write off another £73 million.

And now the money is going to be found by cutting “uncommitted resources” from other projects including £5.5m from the Homes and Communities Agency, £2m from research and £4m from the Fire Improvement Programme.

It gets worse. The select committee

reports that “the Department’s accounts suggested that its total loss could eventually be up to some £250m as a result of the mismanagement of European funds ...” It hoped “that no more badly-needed funding disappears as a result of the incompetence and mismanagement which characterised these programmes.”

Mishandled



And, as the housing market continues its meltdown, the home information packs (HIPs) plan did not go down well with the select committee.

Once again HIPs are said to be “an example of CLG’s inability to build the relationships it needs if it is to succeed in taking partners with it across the whole range of policy The results of the mishandling of the introduction of the HIPs policy are now evident, in that CLG is still struggling to perfect the scheme at a time when the housing market needs more robust and effective initiatives.”

Weakness



The eco-towns policy is also, the select committee says, “clearly in some difficulty” and the difference “between the original vision and the proposals which are now emerging is considerable.”

The original vision of a total of up to 100,000 homes “looks highly unlikely to be achieved: the eco-town programme, even if successful, will make no huge contribution to the very significant problem of housing supply”

The eco-towns policy, like HIPs, “appears to be one of the victims of the Department’s weaknesses in engaging and enthusing its delivery partners.” CLG says it is getting better at engaging and involving “stakeholders”.

That may well be the view from the happy planet CLG, but as the select committee says: “Those involved with the eco-towns policy may find this difficult to believe. Putting this policy back on track to deliver the Prime Minister’s early claims for it will be a difficult task and a severe test of the Department’s progress in a crucial aspect of improving its performance.”

Blood on my stake



Stakeholder feedback and involvement, as has been pointed out before, is critical to the completion of the project. CLG was given some at the Local Government Association Fire conference in Bristol at a FireControl workshop.

Councillor after councillor demanded to know if there were going to be more delays and if the savings claimed meant anything. The councillors scented blood, more delays and more costs. Could the new radio system – FireLink – work in their existing controls, several demanded. The answer is ‘yes’ but CLG needed that answer pulled out of them with pliers. More annoyance from the councillors.

It’s so important to get feedback directly from stakeholders. Ask Count Dracula.

Critical



The select committee is critical of both FireControl and FireBuy, both spun on the basis of massive savings that have not materialised and possibly never will. FireBuy was said to have made savings of £1.5 million. But FireBuy was set up in 2005 and has cost £6 million. Take away £1.5 million savings and that’s a loss, so far, of £4.5 million. FireControl ‘savings’ are spun in much the same way. They are only ‘savings’ if you ignore most of the costs.

Failure



The committee said, among other things: “Both these projects [FireControl and FireBuy] are clear examples of the Department’s failure consistently to base policy making and delivery on the evidence ... Both FireControl and Firebuy would clearly have benefited from more rigorous analysis in the policy formation stage, especially from those with the sort of financial and economic expertise which the Department has now recruited ... and look forward to seeing the fruits of those steps in far more robust and accurate policy formation in the future.”

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Mick Macey (r), Tooting Fire station, London, receives his 25-year badge from Roy Sawh, Tooting branch secretary and Wandsworth borough secretary



Tony Holtby (r), Tooting Fire station, London, receives his 25-year badge from Roy Sawh, Tooting branch secretary and Wandsworth borough secretary



Lee Bray (r), Tooting Fire station, London, receives his 25-year badge from Roy Sawh, Tooting branch secretary and Wandsworth borough secretary



Neil Simms (r), Tooting Fire station, London, receives his 25-year badge from Roy Sawh, Tooting branch secretary and Wandsworth borough secretary



Derek Laurent, Tooting Fire station, London, receives his 25-year badge from Roy Sawh, Tooting branch secretary and Wandsworth borough secretary



FF Jim Henderson (l) receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Richard Morton, County Durham and Darlington FRS



FF Graham Jackson (l) receives his 25-year badge from Brigade Chair Richard Morton County Durham and Darlington FRS



Mark Newton (l) Dunkirk Station Nottinghamshire, receives his 25-year badge from Dave Limer, Region 6 secretary



Trish Wendes (r), senior fire control operator, Isle of Wight, receives her 25-year badge from Paul Fletcher, Region 12 Chair



Rob Turner (centre right), Runcorn, Cheshire receives his 25-year badge from Branch Secretary Rob Everson. Looking on, white watch colleagues: (l to r) Richard Whitley, Huw Coates, Russ Jones, Mark Jones, Givin Hansong, Ade Edwards

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS